

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT MATTERS

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NAVIGATING IN TODAY'S ROUGH SEA OF CHANGES

Catherine Spage, PM Team Member, Department of Information Technology

High performing organizations...budget cuts...strategic planning ... outsourcing...performance measures...there are many internal and external pressures for effectiveness and efficiency in the 21st century, with what may seem like little room for error. The concepts driving management philosophy, while not new, can sometimes be challenging to put into practice. Consider performance measurement—if you aren't willing to consider how you use resources to achieve a certain level of performance and make changes accordingly to achieve it, you are merely providing information, not managing in a meaningful way.

There is no doubt that managing resources is difficult when you have to deal with factors such as stakeholders invested in the current way of doing business who may resist change, human resource rules that may make it difficult to move people from one type of work to another, budget constraints that may prevent an initial investment in equipment, training, etc., and time, of which there is never enough. The following fictional example (author unknown) illustrates how an organization can totally “miss the boat” on process improvements and high performance.

Two teams decided to have a canoe race on the

Potomac River. Both practiced long and hard to reach their peak performance before the race. On the big day, Team A won by a mile. Afterwards, Team B, very discouraged and depressed, was determined to find a reason for the crushing defeat. A “Metrics Team,” made up of senior officers was formed to investigate and recommend appropriate action. They noted that Team A had eight members rowing and one steering officer, while they had one member rowing and eight steering officers. So Team B hired a consultant and paid him a lot of money, only to be told that too many people were steering the boat and not enough people were rowing. Team B resisted that approach because they feared repercussions if they reassigned duties, and their staff thought that the consultant didn't adequately understand their organization.

Instead, to avoid another loss to Team A the next year, Team B made other sweeping changes: the rowing team's organizational structure was realigned to four steering officers, three area steering superintendents and one assistant superintendent of steering so staff would feel good about their jobs. They also implemented a new performance system that would give the one person rowing the boat greater incentive to work harder. It was called the

“Rowing Team Quality Program,” with meetings, dinners and a bonus for the rower. “We must give the rower empowerment and enrichment through this quality program,” they said.

The next year, Team A won by two miles. Humiliated, Team B's leadership gave a letter of reprimand to the rower for poor performance, initiated a \$2 million program for development of a new canoe, blamed the loss on a design defect in the paddles, and issued career continuation bonuses and leather rowing jackets to the beleaguered steering officers in the hopes they would stay for next year's race.

There are several morals to this story, which would be funny if there weren't an element of truth to it. If you aren't achieving results, it may be time to consider change, possibly learning from the examples of others who are considered “best in class”. No matter how much it goes

against tradition, your preconceived notions, and your staff's vested interest in staying the course (consider these steering officers who no doubt fought becoming mere rowers), you need to adapt to changing circumstances and retool your rowing team or risk being reduced to a perennial underachiever.

BROWNBAG CANCELLED

Please note that the Brownbag Lunch scheduled for Friday, November 7, 2003 is cancelled. Look for future announcements for the next one to be held in February 2004.



Visit the PM Website:
<http://infoweb/DMB>



On Change:

It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad.



-C.S. Lewis

STAYING ON THE PATH TO HIGH PERFORMANCE

Evan Braff, PM Team Member, Department of Community and Recreation Services

The last issue of *Performance Measurement Matters* presented a case study summarizing the Department of Community and Recreation's (CRS) efforts to integrate services and programs in its regions in order to achieve high performance throughout the organization. Building upon efforts such as that, CRS recently held its 2nd annual retreat to discuss various workforce issues. The planning and implementation of the retreat involved a workgroup of employees from all levels of the organization. While employees discussed a variety of issues, the retreat focused on two major CRS initiatives: evaluation of supervisors and an examination of the current and future regional service initiative where the agency is not divided by programs, but rather is focused on a specific geographic location in order to enable staff to work across programs to coordinate and provide the best mix and quality of services for customers.

Over the past year, a group of employees from all levels of the

organization had been working to develop an improved method for evaluating supervisors. During the retreat, employees were challenged to provide feedback on the process for evaluating supervisors and identify any barriers that could impede the process.

Staff from each of the four CRS regions was also given the opportunity to provide feedback on the current regional model and provide recommendations for its improvement. While this approach represented a significant departure from past practices, the agency recognized that there are still opportunities for continuous improvement so it uses opportunities such as this to discuss and enhance its operations.

For an organization to be high performing, there must be open lines of communication between all of its members. Organizations that do not embrace open communication will ultimately not achieve their potential. An "open

communication" atmosphere encourages employees to:

- Be innovative
- Take measured risks
- Be flexible
- Solve problems on their own
- Embrace a team-based approach
- Take on leadership roles

The attributes described above will ultimately lead to high performance.

The process of providing feedback to supervisors regarding their performance also serves as a developmental tool for enhancing supervision and improving team effectiveness. However, employees are sometimes reluctant to evaluate their supervisor because of the superior/subordinate relationship. Therefore, it is important that the process be confidential, with supervisors committing to understanding the value of this feedback.

As noted above, CRS began the process of moving its services to a regional model over the past year; however, it recognizes that when any organization goes through a redesign, it takes a commitment from all employees to make it a success, and recognition that changes take time as well as a certain level of discomfort. The retreat allowed the members of the organization to celebrate the successes that have resulted from the new model as well as to engage in open discussions about the remaining issues and how they can be solved.

While all of the employees recognized that the organization's change has come a long way, they also recognize that a considerable amount of work is needed to complete the change. Seeing fellow employees' openness to change and commitment to accomplishing it, demonstrated a key element that is needed for CRS or any organization to become a higher performance organization.

CHECK IT OUT ONLINE

Did you know that there's a wealth of information on performance measurement available at your fingertips? Just go to DMB's Infoweb site at <http://infoweb/DMB/> and you will have access to a wide variety of information that is constantly being updated. At the top of the page, click on the Performance Measurement link and you can access the PM database (password required), the four manuals used by Fairfax County (Basic, Data Collection, Surveying, and Managing for Results), all editions to date of this newsletter, the Efficiency Calculation Spreadsheet, a list of resources in the PM Library (in DMB) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) comparative data for the 14 service areas that are benchmarked. Check out the

website to see if your service area is one of those compared.

In addition, there are various links to other local, state and federal PM sites as well as other professional organizations such as the National Association of Counties (NACo). NACo's site can be particularly useful if you are looking for counties with whom to benchmark that are comparable in population and land area to Fairfax County. The Government Accounting Standards Board's site has good information on Service Efforts and Accomplishments Reporting. FirstGov.gov is the federal government's official web portal which contains a broad array of data on various government services including best practices. Go to the City of Charlotte, North Carolina's site if you're looking for

strategic operating plans by agency.

The Department of Management and Budget and the PM Team are always on the lookout for relevant sites to help agencies measure performance better and manage for results. When they come across something useful, like Coral Springs, Florida's Key Intended Outcomes for the Budget, they establish an easy-to-use link. This saves agency staff the time and trouble of searching the Internet for needed information. In addition, when special training is provided – as it was on September 16, 2003 – to show agency staff how they can use ICMA's comparative data, those presentations are frequently posted on the DMB Infoweb site. It pays to check this site out

regularly when you need to find out something specific about performance measurement or if you're just seeking general knowledge. And if you come across something useful that's not already on the site, please let a member of the PM Team know so we can include it for others' benefit.

An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come.



— Victor Hugo